HARAMBEE FLAME

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INTERVIEW: State Senator Ernest Chambers Talks About the Presidential Campaign, His Own Race For U.S. Senate Seat, Relationship Between African People And the Democratic Party, Etc.; EDITORIAL: State And National Politics; Other Features.

Interview: Chambers on Politics

FLAME: Brother Chambers, the business of you running for the U.S. Senate as a candidate of the New Alliance Party--first of all, my question is: Why are you running?

ERNIE: Well, there are issues that need to be discussed in a way that they won't when any of the traditional people run. And by "traditional," I mean any of those who would identify with either of the main parties--the Demogogues or the Repelicans. They will make general, grandiose statements and promises that never really get down to where people live. For example, we, as ordinary people, may be concerned about the huge military budget and see it being bloated because of the fraud and theft, the cost-overruns, the stretching out of a contract over a number of years when they're developing a new piece of equipment or a weapons system so that they can plunder the public till. And we, as ordinary people, recognize that that budget could probably be easily cut in half without endangering at all the country's ability to defend itself. What the traditional politicians will say is, "Well, America has to stay strong so that it can kick the rear end of Grenada or intimidate and menace Libya and be a strong ally of Iraq and Israel in the Persian Gulf." So when they use those kinds of buzz-words and speak in generalities and promise things that cannot be delivered, it's the same warmed-over soup again. And if the public is going to accept it, I don't blame these politicians for doing it because it's such an easy, non-thinking course to follow.

FLAME: Okay now. But, Ernie, there are going to be people who will say--for example, we know, in the U. S. Senate race in Nebraska, you've got the Demopublicans and the Republicrats. But, anyway, there are going to be people who will say that, more than likely, the person whose votes you will probably take away from would be the previous Governor's, Kerrey.

ERNIE: And I would say, "So what."

FLAME: Well, of course, these folks would probably say, "But, but, but...Brother Chambers, we've always gone with the Democratic Party and, as bad as the Republican Party is, you'd be helping get them into office." How would you respond to that?

ERNIE: The Democrats are going to have to present their program in such a way that, whoever runs--me or anybody else--that major Democratic candidate can draw in these votes. Nobody owns people's votes. So, if my running draws people to me as voters, it simply means that what I'm offering is more in line with what they'd want in a public official than what the other two are offering. And I owe nothing to Bob Kerrey, to the Democratic Party, or any other special interest group. My job is to lay out for myself first of all what I think is the proper course for me as a public official to follow. I present that the best I possibly can and what portion of the public that agrees with it will vote for me. That portion that doesn't agree will foolishly vote the other way. But, as far as being worried about the fortunes of Bob Kerrey and the Democratic Party, that can't mean anything to me. In this state, for example, we were no better off, as black people, poor people, and other disenfranchized groups; we were no better off under Exon and Zorinsky, who were Democrats, than we were under Curtis and Hruska.

FLAME: But now just a minute, Ernie. There are going to be folks, I would think--folks probably connected with groups like the Urban League, the N.A.A.C.P., and maybe African folks in the League of Women Voters, and so forth, some of these other established organizations--who are going to say, "Yes, but Ernie, you can't win; so by voting for you, wouldn't we be wasting our votes?"

ERNIE: They don't know how I view life and what my role in life is. We all have a destiny to meet.

And we must do those things that are in accord with our concept of our destiny. And mine, again, is not based upon what these Establishment groups would desire to seek, out of their fear and trembling. A new departure often has to be made by an individual who may not see things that others don't see, but is willing to cut a trail toward those things that other people see as being needed but which they are afraid to pursue. So these kinds of groups might feel that a vote for me is a wasted vote. But if they did vote for me, what it would show these Establishment candidates is that a type of independence is developing among the electorate which is going to lead it to support the individual they believe really will do that which ought to be done and don't consider, initially, whether or not, based on polls and all of the odds, he or she is likely to win.

FLAME: Okay. Now since we're talking about the questions of wasted votes and who wins and who takes votes from whomever, there seems to me to be a parallel between the matter of your running in the general election against the Republicans and Democrats, against Karnes and Kerrey, and the situation Jesse Jackson finds himself in now--particularly if, for example, after the Democratic Convention, Jesse were to continue to run, but as an independent candidate, against the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates. It seems to me that there's a parallel between your situation and some kind of situation that might result after the Democratic Convention. Whether or not that's likely, I don't know. But would you like to comment on whether you see such a parallel yourself and what is the importance of it?

ERNIE: In a sense there is because, although he is running under the Democrat banner, he is advocating positions and would like to get planks into the platform of the Democratic Party which the traditionalists of that party are opposed to. So, in a sense, he's swimming against the current.

But in the process of doing what he has done, he has drawn a lot more people into the system--in terms of registering, voting, working in his campaign, knocking on doors, stuffing envelopes, doing those things they find it in their power to do. Dukakis, and no other Democratic candidate, has been able to inspire that kind of interest and enthusiasm. So Jesse Jackson has created a constituency that is expectant in terms of wanting something different from what has occurred. If that expectation is disappointed, they will either turn to Jackson, if he runs as an independent--and I really don't know how he could do that in all the states--or they might vote for somebody who's already on the ballot, like Lenora Fulani--not necessarily that they think she will win.

FLAME: Excuse me. Now for the sake of those who might not know, who is Lenora Fulani?

ERNIE: Okay. She is the person who is running for the New Alliance Party for president; and her name will appear on the ballot in all fifty states. It's a name right there where people who are dissatisfied can send their votes and those votes could then be counted as votes that were not going to either party(Republican or Democrat). But without her, then the votes might indeed be thrown away because there's no way to trace them.

FLAME: In view of your attitude or your belief that we are no better off with the Democrats than we are with the Republicans and vice-versa, what would you suggest that African folks in this country do in the general election if, say, Jesse is not going to be running as an independent, or for those African folks who do not know enough about the New Alliance Party or do not know enough about Lenora Fulani? What do you suggest that these folks do?

ERNIE: Faced with what you've just laid out, they shouldn't vote in the presidential election at all. They should withhold their vote.

(Continued on page 6)

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.) is a pan-Africanist newsletter. This means that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this policy is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wop ashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send your submissions to: HARAMBEE FLAME
Harambee Afrikan Cul. Org.
Attn: Editor/Mondo
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

Note on poetry submissions: We are looking for poems that make effective use of imagery, that have beauty and power, and that do not sacrifice such for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme.

FLAME: But, Ernie, I have heard folks right in Omaha, African folks like you and me, but who are connected with more traditional organizations, say, time and time again, especially around election time, "Our foreparents suffered and died for you to have the right to vote and you have, essentially, no right not to vote."

ERNIE: But the right to do something includes the right not to do it. If you must do something, then there's no freedom or volition there. There is compulsion and no choice involved. If you have only Jesse James or Jack The Ripper to support, if you vote for Jesse and he robs your bank, you caused that. If you vote for Jack The Ripper and he wipes out your women, you caused that. So people of our kind should never allow ourselves to be put in positions where we feel compelled to vote for somebody who's working against our interests. So it would be better to withhold supporting either one who is going to harm us rather than vote for one and say, "Well I had to cast a vote." There are other offices that are up that people can vote for. And I would say that they should try to hurry up and inform themselves of what this situation is that we're confronting and vote for Fulani...First of all, when people vote in an election, they're not voting for the individual whose name is there. They're voting to determine where the electoral votes of that state are going to be cast. Since, in a state like Nebraska, it's a foregone conclusion that most of the people who are going to vote are going to vote for the George Bush camp, he is going to get all of Nebraska's electoral votes. So every vote cast for Dukakis means nothing. And because it is the number of electoral votes that determines who wins the presidency, then the popular vote really means nothing. It's an exercise in futility on the part of the people. And because of what I've just said, a person can get a majority of the popular vote and not win the election, because he has not gotten the majority of the electoral vote.

FLAME: Okay, now let me go back to something you said earlier. You talked about the value of Jesse Jackson.

ERNIE: But let me finish this one point. So any vote for Dukakis is a throw-away vote in Nebraska anyway. When they vote for Dukakis in Nebraska, which is solidly behind George Bush, they're voting for nobody.

FLAME: So, as far as you're concerned, those people who would be inclined to vote Democrat would be wasting their vote anyway.

ERNIE: Absolutely. Black or white.

FLAME: Now let me go back to something you said earlier. You, in talking about Jesse Jackson, made a comment about, a comment that really had to do with his value to the Democratic Party. And what you said--and it's something that's been said by others--is that he has energized African people as well as other folks, has gotten them involved in the political process, pulled them in--if you will--into the mainstream, politically speaking. The question I want to ask, though, is that really of value to <u>us</u> for him to have done this?

ERNIE: Only if he continues the path he has started cutting. That means, if he is not considered for the vice-presidency and that's what he wants, he should not deliver those votes to those who stabbed him in the back. If he does deliver the votes, and he does turn into a good ol' boy--as they call those kinds of people--then the Democrats can continue to give us the back of the hand, spit on us, and take us for granted. Saudi Arabia got tired of that--and this is slightly off the subject but it makes the point. They cut an arms deal with Great Britain and they said that they would have liked to continue doing business with the United States. But they're not masochists and they're not going to spend millions of dollars

with this country and be insulted in the process. So, since Congress, who is strongly controlled by Israel, is going to fight against Saudi Arabia obtaining from America the type of weaponry they need, they don't have to take that any more. They went to Britain. Kuwait did the same thing by turning to the Soviet Union. And this is going to hurt that monstrous weapons industry in this country and the related jobs. So Americans, because of the penchant Congress has for Israel, are going to be hurt in their economy without gaining anything. Now if Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had continued to allow themselves to be insulted by Congress and would buy what piddling weapons Congress would agree to give them, and that Israel would agree to, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would continue to be walked on and they would deserve what they'd get. With us, if we continue to allow these people--Democrats--to walk on us, spit on us, we deserve it. And if we put them in power, we deserve the back of the hand they are going to give to us. If, while they need our help to get what it is they want, they insult us and show us utter disregard, you know it's going to be worse once they're in the driver's seat and no longer need anything from us.

FLAME: Ernie, there were some people who, after the '84 Convention--the '84 Democratic Convention --after seeing Jesse Jackson arrive at the doors of the Convention with four so-called "non-negotiable demands" and then, finding himself in the midst of the Convention with the Democratic Party having essentially told him, "up yours and up your demands," and then to see him, despite all that, still give his support to the Democratic nominee--there are people who say that he lost at that point any respect that we should have, or did have, for him. Where do you see Jesse right now?

ERNIE: I see his as justifying those kinds of attitudes. That was my attitude. But when he started running this time, he seemed as though he had

learned something and that he was not going to be put in that position of doing the Democratic Party's work of rallying votes that they wouldn't otherwise be able to get and then let them spit on him again. But the Democratic Party has a longer institutional memory than four years, and they remember how, last time around, they were able to insult him and he stayed with them. So they're just going to do the same thing this year. They did it then and got away with it. They'll do it this year and get away with it. And it will forever be that way.

FLAME: Let me ask you another question, and this goes back specifically to your campaign. Now you are the official nominee for the office of the U.S. Senate in Nebraska for the New Alliance Party. Questions have been raised in a number of publications about what the New Alliance Party actually is. It describes itself as a multi-racial, black-led, left-of-center party. But questions have been raised about whether or not it is actually African led; two, whether or not it is actually a political party or some kind of psychiatric cult group under the leadership of a Jewish Caucasian; and some other questions. Now you have stated, according to this morning's news, that, while you accepted the nomination of the Party, that it will have to get used to the fact that you speak your own mind and that you would not necessarily agree with everything that they may put forth. Do you feel comfortable in your relationship with the Party at this time?

ERNIE: Oh yeah, because they understand exactly where I stand and that my aim is to make that Party, if it is a party, more like me rather than me becoming more like it. And I've pointed out from the beginning that I don't see evidence of it being black-led. But since they make that profession, they need to come into contact with some strong black leadership, such as is exemplified by me. Then they'll understand whether that's a term

they'll want to continue using or, as Malcolm X used to say, "want to jump back in the alley and get out of the way." But when it comes to a political party that's trying to reach out all over the country for people, they make as broad an appeal as they can; and they say things that are geared to particular constituencies. There are Democrats who are black who are in the same Democratic Party with Democrats in the South, who are called "Dixiecrats," who are racist through and through and spoke and fought against anything that would offer a suggestion that black people might be entitled to some human decency and self-respect and laws to uphold civil rights. Yet these black people remain members of the Democratic Party. The same thing with Republicans. There are black people who associate or affiliate with that Party, along with Strom Thurmond, Jesse Helms, and some of these other notorious racists. So we are never, in a society where the majority of the people are white, going to find an organization that is primarily aimed at helping us achieve our ends. So we've got to take hold of these instrumentalities that exist and turn them to our purposes. And by so doing, we sometimes turn the tables on those who sought to use us as pawns. They find out that, instead of the puppets, we're really the puppeteers.

FLAME: Let me ask you one final question. Some years ago, an organization was formed, called the National Black Independent Political Party. As you may recall, they had a big convention in Gary, Indiana. And one of the functions of the Party was that of local, regional, and national organizing behind issues and sometimes behind political candidates. Before the organization's demise, they attempted to get an African person to run for president, with their support. One of the persons they asked, as I understand, was Ron Dellums; and he declined the offer. Sometime after that, as I mentioned, the organization died, or simply disappeared, because we haven't heard anything from it.

What do you see as being, in political terms, the kinds of things that African people in this country should be doing right now?

ERNIE: Well, the kinds of things that I think we're ultimately going to have to do are not the kinds of things we would discuss in an interview like this. But if you look at it in a political sense, because we do have the right under the law to register and vote and because politicians do respond to large groups of voters, that's what a lot of black people ought to do who are not going to participate in any other activity. Register and then vote. But find somebody to vote for who is in harmony with what we believe in and, if there is no such person, then persuade somebody to run or make it clear, in an organized fashion, that our vote is going to be withheld.

FLAME: Then it is your position, as far as this presidential election is concerned, that we are certainly better off without either the Democratic or Republican Party.

ERNIE: Right. When you look at what has happened today, and the Democrats treating us with contempt that they have at a time when they need us, we certainly can't look for anything in the way of fair treatment from them when they get in office. So we would be better off not supporting either of these people.

-The above interview with Ernie Chambers, the lone African member of the Nebraska Legislature, was conducted on July 11, 1988.

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Choosing A Political Path

Since we did the interview with Brother Chambers, a number of notable developments have taken place. As to the matter of the Democratic presidential campaign, Dukakis became the Party's nominee and had Lloyd Bentsen confirmed as his running mate. Jesse Jackson was permitted to address the Democratic Convention. Through reportedly "intense" negotiations between representatives of the Jackson and Dukakis camps, as well as between the two men themselves, a possible skirmish between Jackson and Dukakis forces was averted. In Jackson's address before the Convention, he called for unity and common ground. And subsequent interviews with Jackson and Jackson delegates suggests that all is sweetness and roses in the Democratic Party.

As to the U.S. Senate race in Nebraska, the State Attorney General has issues a series of opinions in which it is claimed that Ernie Chambers cannot run for both the Senate and the seat in the Nebraska State Legislature, which he already holds. Curiously, the State Attorney General, was appointed to his position by Senate Candidate Robert Kerrey while Kerrey was Nebraska's Governor and is supporting Kerrey in his Senate bid. Ernie has challenged the Attorney General's opinion and has received a commitment from the New Alliance Party that it will support him in efforts to fight attempts to keep him off the ballot as a Senate candidate. In a related matter, while the African delegates from Nebraska who attended the Atlanta Convention as members of the Jackson camp have stated that they will support the Dukakis-Bentsen ticket in November, at least a couple of them have expressed reservations about supporting Robert Kerrey. They have complained that Kerrey, during his stint as Governor, did not keep certain promises he had made regarding the matter of appointment of Africans to positions in State Government.

With respect to the U.S. Senate race, in which Ernie is running against Robert Kerrey(Dem.) and David Karnes(Rep.), the disenchantment with Kerrey expressed by certain African Democrats raises a couple of issues. One, this disenchantment should be rooted in more than simply a matter of the ex-Governor Kerrey's failure to appoint Africans to government positions. In fact, Kerrey's administration was one in which African people and our needs were ignored generally. And there is no reason for us to believe that some concern on his part for the needs of African people will magically materialize by virtue of his becoming a member of the U.S. Senate. The fact is that, at the present time, Ernie Chambers is a candidate for the U.S. Senate. Ernie, in his almost two decades in the Nebraska Unicameral, has never failed to give unquestionable proof that he is committed to African people in this state, to our needs and aspirations. The fact that he is running for the U.S. Senate should serve to clear up any ambivalence some of us might be feeling about the Kerrey candidacy. It would be nothing short of outright foolishness for African people in this state to support Robert Kerrey over Chambers. It would be sending a clear message to Kerrey: You disrespected and disregarded us before. Please do it again.

Likewise, with respect to the presidential campaign, a vote for the Democrats will be tantamount to asking for abuse. We have an opportunity, either by supporting Lenora Fulani or by boycotting(in organized and public fashion) the presidential election, to put the Democratic Party on notice that it can no longer receive our support for nothing in exchange and to set into motion a movement of independent politics in which we can be our own ideological masters. At some point, we have to put behind us the question of who has the greatest chance of winning a given election and give sight to long-term political interests.

-Editor

Back In Time

...the case of Tom Watson: This Populist from Georgia was at one time a staunch advocate of a united front between Negro and white farmers. In 1892, he wrote: "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."

But this is the same Tom Watson who, only a few years later and because the political tide was flowing against such an alliance, did a complete turnabout. At that time, Democrats were disfranchising black people in state after state. But, as John Hope Franklin recorded in FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, "Where the Populists were unable to control the Negro vote, as in Georgia in 1894, they believed that the Democrats had never completely disfranchised the Negroes because their votes were needed if the Democrats were to stay in power. This belief led the defeated and disappointed Tom Watson to support a constitutional amendment excluding the Negro from the franchise--a complete reversal of his position in denouncing South Carolina for adopting such an amendment in 1895(p. 218).

Source: BLACK POWER: THE POLITICS OF LIBERATION IN AMERICA by Stokely Carmichael & Charles V. Hamilton

Announcements

On Tuesday, August 16, the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization will be holding a meeting of its youth committee and persons from Omaha's and Lincoln's African communities who are working to address problems of violence, drugs, etc. among our young people. This meeting will be held from 8 to 10 in the morning and will focus on the question of how the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization and persons and groups outside the prison can work together to seek resolution to problems facing our youth. If you are interested in attending this meeting or simply want information, we encourage you to contact us. Write: Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502 -0500. Or call 471-3161(ext. 380 or 379) between the hours of 12:30 and 3:00 p.m. Ask for the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization sponsor. He will put you in touch with an available member of our central committee. We also encourage you to contact us about our regular membership meetings, which are held approximately four times per month, on Tuesdays and Sundays, and run from 5:45 to 8:00.

In the current edition of BREAKTHROUGH(VOL. XII, No. 1) there are two very interesting interviews with Kwame Ture(previously, Stokely Carmichael) and Chokwe Lumumba. The interviews cover several significant topics related to the ongoing struggle of African people in this country to achieve the liberation that has, thus far, elluded us. To get copies of this edition of BREAKTHROUGH, write:

BREAKTHROUGH/PFOC
P.O. Box 14422
San Francisco, CA
94114

Our Sources

A regular feature of the HARAMBEE FLAME, and the most time-consuming in preparation, is "From Other Sources." In this feature, we present to you excerpts of articles, from various publications, that focus on events and/or developments in African populations and/or that address issues that are, or should be, of concern to African people. We attempt to present as universal a coverage of such events and developments as possible. Operating out of a Pan-Africanist perspective, we want you, our readers, to be kept abreast of situations African people face in the U.S., the Caribbean, Africa itself, and elsewhere throughout the Diaspora

Obviously, we find that some publications are better sources than others. Among these better sources are THE GUARDIAN and AFRICA NEWS. We list THE GUARDIAN because it regularly contains articles about African people, does not beat its readers over the head with a lot of ponderous leftist jargon, and its journalism is investigative and often hard-hitting. AFRICA NEWS is valuable because it focuses almost entirely on events and developments in the nations of Africa and presents information that is often not to be found in other publications. We list here the mailing addresses of THE GUARDIAN, AFRICA NEWS, as well as a couple of other sources we have found useful.

THE GUARDIAN(33 W. 17th St; N.Y., N.Y.; 10011)
AFRICA NEWS(P.O. Box 3851; Durham, N.C.; 27702)
IN THESE TIMES(1300 W. Belmont; Chicago, ILL; 60657)
UNITY(P.O. Box 29293; Oakland, CA; 94604)

We are, at this time, trying to increase the number of magazines and newspapers with which we have publications-exchange agreements. We welcome suggestions as to publications we might use as valuable sources of information.